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TURNING TO FREEDOM

Oliver O'Donovan, *Ethics as Theology*, vol. 1: *Self, World, and Time* (Grand Rapids MA, Eerdmans, 2013. £16.99. pp. vii + 138. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6921-0).

This volume originates in several shorter publications since 2007. Its subtitle identifies the triad of objects to which, O'Donovan insists, the moral agent must attend. Yet each points beyond itself into a single deeper wisdom. O'Donovan here pursues his developing critique of authority begun in *The Ways of Judgment*, now recognizing freedom to be a 'wider category than authority' (p. 53). This is a striking shift away from the authoritarianism of his *Resurrection and Moral Order*, in which freedom was merely authority's 'objective correlate'. The present volume also announces a connected change of focus from the objective moral order toward the renewal of subjective agency. There are other, continuing, themes. These include an opposition to contractualist and immanentist ethical theories; the close reading of scripture as part of a *ressourcement* of Christian ethics; and Augustine, especially the *Enchiridion*.

O'Donovan demonstrates strong commitment to ethics as a deliberative enterprise. Deliberation is the tipping point between moral (that is, practical) reason and action, and is therefore fundamental to agency. Bridging the description of action's context and the resolution to act, deliberation is inductive rather than deductive, employing no premises and reaching no conclusions. Although issuing in action, it culminates in prayer, which orders practical thought. Deliberation and even agency are not, however, autonomous, being collective, communicative and taught. This is not to diminish personal responsibility but to set such responsibility within the relational context that, one might add, intensifies it.

The agency here delineated is evidently not Kantian, being encompassed and formed by the theological virtues: faith, the prior act of knowledge in which, for O'Donovan, the very possibility of morality is rooted; love, the 'reflective moment of practical reason turned outwards to reality' (p. 125); and hope, which is founded on promise. All three virtues are important: we need more than just love. Nevertheless, O'Donovan perhaps edges closer to the Kantian (although not neo-Kantian) moral subjectivity of the first and second *Critiques* than he admits, via notions like the centrality of moral action to human life, practical reason, rational agency, freedom in the realm of phenomena, determination in the realm of eternal truth and the impossibility of 'pure' description. Although we'll be unlikely to see him outside the gates of Faslane brandishing these tomes any time soon, ethicists more politically radical than he should view these developments, and those to follow in *Finding and Seeking* and *Entering Into Rest*, with interest.

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